

## Management Tool

### Problem Solving Technique: 4 Steps to Improve Your Processes

This tool contains a useful problem solving technique to help you improve your business processes. Critical examination is a structured questioning process which uses Kipling's six honest serving men: what, why, when, how, where and who. (see [Best Management Tools Ever? A Good Question](#) for more on the importance of asking the right questions. The questions in this tool are designed to help you examine your business processes, and to help identify possible improvements.

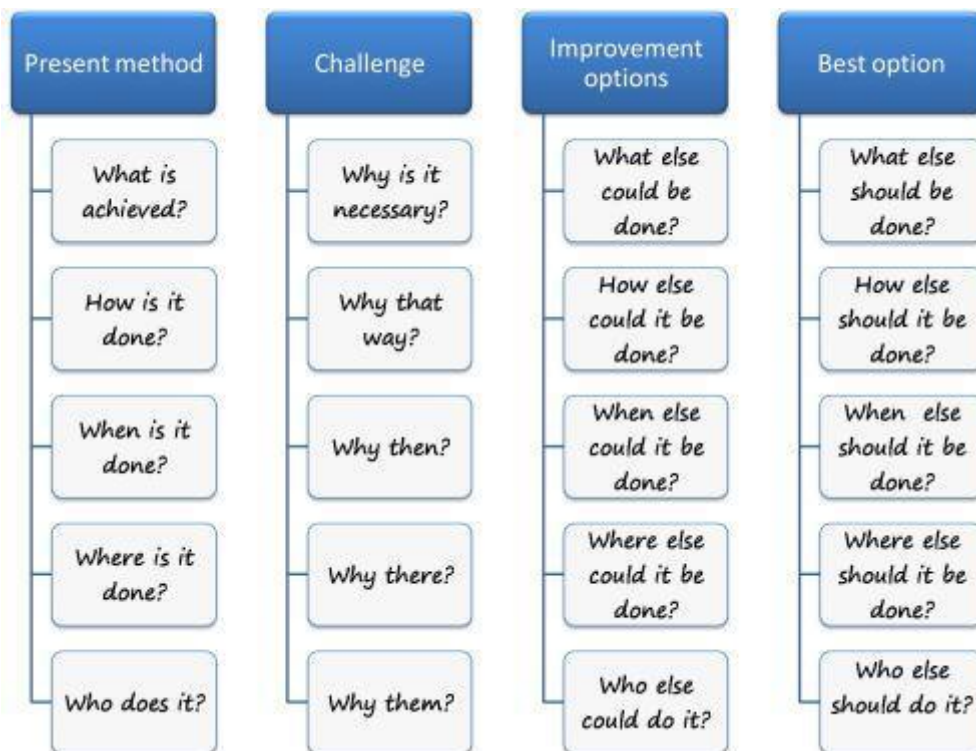


First flow-chart the process you wish to improve. Then apply the systematic, structured, questioning technique, detailed below. Think about the task yourself, then involve any team members. Encourage creativity but ensure each step is taken in a thorough and disciplined

## The Critical Examination Technique

Read the questions in this problem solving technique then follow these 4 steps:

1. Answer the questions in the first column. These summarize the present process method, asking: what; how; when; where; and who.
2. Challenge each of your answers by asking "why?"
3. Use column three to help you generate a range of improvement options
4. Use column four to help you decide on the best option.



Adapted from Michael Tucker's *Successful Process Management in a Week*

## **Tips To Implement The Critical Examination Technique**

To make improvements to a process, work with the team responsible for that process.

Use step 1 to:

- **identify the purpose of the process;**
- **explore what customers and stakeholders expect the process to deliver.**

Use step 2 to:

- **analyse how the process works, and its resource requirements;**
- **explore ways of measuring its efficiency and effectiveness.**

Use step 3 to:

- **examine ways to improve the process;**
- **assess the implications and consequences of these improvements.**

Use step 4 to:

- **decide on the best option, given available resources.**

(A copy of the table is included on page 4 with space for you to add any comments)

### **A final tip:**

Look for the small changes to the process which could have a big impact on the process as a whole.

**“What small change would significantly improve the process?”**



Present method	Challenge	Improvement options	Best option
1 What is achieved?	Why is it necessary?	What else could be done?	What else should be done?
2 How is it done?	Why that way?	How else could it be done?	How should it be done?
3 When is it done?	Why then?	When else could it be done?	When should it be done?
4 Where is it done?	Why there?	Where else could it be done?	Where should it be done?
5 Who does it?	Why them?	Who else could do it?	Who should do it?